



# Anthrax

## What is anthrax?

- Anthrax is a rare disease caused by a bacterium, which is capable of forming spores that can survive in the environment for long periods of time. Anthrax most commonly occurs in animals, such as cattle, pigs, sheep and goats. Anthrax infection can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalational (lung), and gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines). In an intentional exposure, such as a bioterrorism event, breathing in the spores is the most likely route of exposure that might lead to a serious infection.

## How is anthrax spread? What are the symptoms?

- You can get anthrax by handling infected animals or other materials containing anthrax spores, eating infected meat or breathing in spores. The bacteria are resistant to drying and can remain alive for long periods of time. The disease is NOT passed from person to person. Symptoms depend on how a person is exposed to the disease, and usually occur within one to seven days after exposure, but can take as long as 60 days to develop.

- **Inhalational anthrax** (through the lungs) is the most serious type of anthrax and is caused by inhaling anthrax bacteria into the lungs. Initial symptoms may resemble those of flu or a common cold, such as fever, cough, headache, chills, weakness, difficulty breathing and chest discomfort. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. This type of anthrax infection is often fatal if not treated promptly.

- **Cutaneous anthrax** (through cuts in the skin) is caused when anthrax bacteria make direct contact with skin that has a cut or break in it. Initial symptoms include an itchy bump. Later stage symptoms include a small blister, which evolves into a painless sore with a black center. Lymph glands in the infected area may also swell.

- **Gastrointestinal anthrax** (stomach and intestines) is caused by the ingestion of anthrax bacteria. It is characterized by an acute inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial symptoms include nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and fever, followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

## Recognizing possible anthrax contamination

- If you have symptoms, consult a health care provider. If you believe you have been intentionally exposed to anthrax, you should contact law enforcement officials immediately.
- If you receive a letter or package that may contain anthrax:
  - Set the package down gently and leave it undisturbed to avoid release of spores into the air.
  - Immediately wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.
  - Call 9-1-1 to report the incident. Follow the instructions of the 9-1-1 operators until help arrives.
  - Remember: Do not handle the package further unless necessary.

## Treatment for anthrax

- Antibiotics can be used to prevent or treat an infection in persons exposed to anthrax. All forms of the disease need to be treated promptly. Since anthrax is not spread from person to person, there is no need to immunize or treat contacts of persons ill with anthrax, such as household members, friends, or coworkers, unless they also were exposed to the same source of infection. An anthrax vaccine also can prevent infection, but it is currently not available for the public. Antibiotics should be used to prevent or treat anthrax only under the direction of your health care provider or local health department.



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